



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD D. SPENCE

Today the committee will address the critical and timely national security question concerning whether or not the commitment of U.S. ground forces to Bosnia, Macedonia and Kosovo is vital to our security interests.

Our witnesses this morning are:

- The Honorable Walter B. Slocombe, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy; and
- General Wesley K Clark, Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. European Command, and Supreme Allied Commander, Europe.

Last week, the House voted in reluctant support of the Administration's proposal to deploy 4,000 U.S. ground troops to Kosovo as part of a NATO peacekeeping force in the event of a peace agreement. As the debate indicated, there is a great deal of uncertainty over – and opposition to – the Administration's proposals. My own belief is that the situation in Kosovo, though tragic, does not directly threaten U.S. security and therefore does not warrant the introduction of U.S. ground forces. This does not mean that the U.S. should not play an integral role in NATO peacekeeping operations in Europe – it simply means that we should not allow our NATO allies or either of the parties at the negotiating table to blackmail the United States into an open-ended ground presence.

I reached the same conclusion prior to the deployment of U.S. troops to Bosnia. Indeed, many of the arguments made in regard to our role in are being recycled for Kosovo. While our presence on the ground in Bosnia for the past three and a half years may have helped to contain a humanitarian problem, the cold reality is that our presence has not brought stability to the broader region, has not prevented ethnic animosities from escalating in Kosovo, and has had absolutely no impact on the larger balance of power in Europe.

Moreover, the issues associated with the military "means" in any Kosovo peacekeeping operations are as important as the strategic "ends." The severe reductions in American ground forces and budgets of recent years, along with an already demanding pace of operations not only in Bosnia but around the globe, greatly compound the costs and implications of a long-term Kosovo deployment.

The direct costs of the United States' involvement in the Balkan peace effort continue to mount. Some 7,000 U.S. troops are currently deployed in Bosnia and neighboring countries in support of Operation Joint Forge. The costs of operations in and around the former Yugoslavia have already cost the Department of Defense almost \$10 billion through the current fiscal year. In addition, the deployment of U.S. ground forces in Kosovo would, according to the Department of Defense, cost an additional \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion each year.

Beyond these direct costs, significant indirect costs have also been mounting. If the Kosovo deployment goes forward, the U.S. ground presence in the Balkans soon will total nearly a division's worth of U.S. troops. Based upon the arithmetic of power projection, that would mean that two other divisions are also involved either preparing to deploy or retraining after rotating out of theater. But in fact, the strains caused by Balkan-style peacekeeping are far more severe than that, due to the shortage of troops and units with the special skills needed in the Balkans.

The growing direct and indirect costs of peacekeeping in the Balkans are contributing to the risk associated with our military's ability to execute the core missions called for under U.S. national security strategy. This Committee is aware of and sensitive to the serious risks we face in deterring or fighting two major conflicts in Korea and in the Persian Gulf. We stand on the verge of a significant expansion of what has become a semi-permanent U.S. military presence. In General Clark's headquarters, they speak of the Balkans as a third "Major Theater War," *not* because of the prospect of high-intensity combat, but because of the stresses and strains on a force repeatedly asked to "do more with less." Should the Administration decide to deploy U.S. troops to Kosovo, I believe it must quickly revisit funding and force structure assumptions in order to better manage growing "risk."

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